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President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 106 *(continued)*

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family: follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.6)

The President: I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 5 October 1999 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the Assembly hear a statement by the observer of the Holy See at its plenary meetings devoted to this item.

Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal that the Assembly hear the observer of the Holy See?

It was so decided.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Older persons are an indispensable pillar of any society. They represent the history of a nation and the essence of its experience. That experience gives rise to the rebirth of peoples and nations and to the building of civilizations, and consequently to that of human civilization as a whole. In recognition of this, the General Assembly declared 1999 the International Year of Older Persons. We praise the work that went into the report before the Assembly in document A/54/268, entitled "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies".

Here we must stress the fact that not all societies or communities experience problems relating to the elderly. Such problems can vary depending on the prevailing family and societal relationships in those communities, and on the cultural and religious education they provide.

The State of Kuwait has always devoted attention and interest to the elderly; it has always cared for them because they played a pioneering role in the establishment of modern Kuwait and in the preservation of its structure. Islam prescribes that older people must be given special care; it commands Muslims to be gracious and kind to them and to remove all difficulties and impediments from their surroundings. God Almighty has declared:

> "Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents." [The Holy Koran, XVIII:23]

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The Kuwaiti constitution provides for care for all citizens in old age, in ill health and in disability, through the provision of social security and health care services. A ministerial decision issued in 1998 established a supreme advisory committee to draw up plans for visiting home care for the elderly; that committee is responsible for supervising the project and laying the foundations of a successful policy on older persons. This important accomplishment reflects the increasing interest of the State of Kuwait in older persons; it is typical of the support we provide for older persons and reflects their status in Kuwaiti society. We provide home care for older people through social workers instead of placing them in homes for the elderly; our older people receive excellent care and services.

The care of older people is basic to Kuwaiti social care services, which receive constant support from the State. We provide a variety of services and kinds of care. For instance, the State provides nursing homes and day care, including home care. In short, we provide older people with all kinds of services, programmes and activities in their homes, making use of trained specialists. The life expectancy of Kuwaiti citizens has increased; for women it has reached 74, and for men 72, thanks to State services and care for the elderly.

Parallel with the United Nations commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons, Kuwait established a national committee to prepare for the Year. The activities of our commemoration include round-table discussions and scientific seminars on all matters relating to older persons, including professional, psychological, health and social issues, and leisure activities for older persons; conducting a field study to collect data on cases of diseases or chronic ailments in older persons in hospitals and evaluating all questions relating to them and finding the necessary solutions; honouring the first generation of older persons, who contributed to the rebirth of our country; training the providers of care to older persons in nursing homes and hospitals, with a view to improving the quality of care; organizing a mass media campaign to promote the new system of care for older persons, namely the mobile in-home care services, through a comprehensive, centralized and specialized working group for the provision of care to older persons at home in full coordination with their families.

The project aims at preserving the dignity of older persons, providing care and services at home and solving their social and psychological problems. We provide nursing and hospital services, family guidance regarding balanced nutrition, leisure and recreational means, and all medical appliances and equipment needed by the elderly.

As we approach the dawn of the twenty-first century, I cannot but pay homage to the United Nations General Assembly for declaring 1999 the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme "A society for all ages", since at the beginning of 2002, older persons will constitute 25 per cent of the total population of the developing countries, which will have a profound effect on their social and economic development.

Mr. Chandraprasert (Thailand): It is an honour and a pleasure for me to participate in this plenary meeting of the General Assembly to give a brief report on Thailand's observance of the International Year of Older Persons. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies", which highlights the achievements made during this important Year in promoting the welfare of older persons.

In Thailand, those who are 60 years old or over are regarded as older persons. Today older persons make up about 8.9 per cent of our population, or 5.5 million individuals. It is estimated that within the next decade, this figure will increase to between 7 million and 8 million as a result of significant progress in health care and medical technology.

The problems facing Thailand's older persons are wide-ranging. Whether in the areas of health, income, housing or accessibility to social services, these problems have a strong impact on older persons and pose significant challenges to society in dealing with them. The situation has been compounded by the transformation of the family unit in past decades, from the extended family to the nuclear family, which has further increased the demands on government to take care of older persons.

How are the challenges being met? Fortunately for Thailand, older persons are highly revered in our society. Our traditional culture encourages young people to respect and care for older persons. This traditional culture goes some way towards alleviating the problems faced by older persons.

Furthermore, the Government and non-governmental organizations have implemented preventive and protective programmes for older persons, in accordance with the

guidelines of the World Assembly on Ageing, convened in Vienna in 1982. The National Committee on the Elderly was appointed in 1982, and in the same year, 13 April of each year was declared National Ageing Day. The Government has also encouraged every province throughout the country to establish a club for the elderly where older persons can come together to organize activities for themselves and society at large. At present, there are more than 3,000 older persons' clubs in Thailand. In 1989 these clubs agreed to set up the Senior Citizens Council of Thailand, which acts as the coordinating body of all associations and clubs for older persons, including governmental and non-governmental organizations, within the country.

Policies to support the elderly are integrated into the national policy. They are in line with three national master plans, namely, the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001), the National Long-Term Policies and Measures on Older Persons (1992-2011) and the Third National Social Welfare and Social Work Development Plan (1997-2001). On the basis of these three national master plans, the Government will undertake the following to help foster the well-being of older persons: promoting health care knowledge, expanding basic social services, encouraging the transfer of experience from older to younger persons, promoting the value of reciprocal family obligation, supporting preferred religious and moral values, subsidizing service provision by communities and non-governmental organizations, increasing the training of service providers for older persons and promoting data compilation, research and project evaluation.

In observance of the 1999 International Year of Older Persons, the Department of Public Welfare, under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, has been designated the national focal point to arrange activities to celebrate the Year. In organizing activities to mark this event, we have adhered to our belief in the principle that older persons are both contributors to and recipients of benefits from society, a principle widely recognized by the United Nations and the international community.

On this basis, the National Committee on the International Year of Older Persons, chaired by Mr. Chuan Leekpai, Prime Minister of Thailand, has launched a programme of activities nationwide with the participation of the Government, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and, most importantly, older persons. The following activities are some of the highlights of the programme.

First, the Government launched Thailand's International Year of Older Persons at the Government House, chaired by the Prime Minister, before the week of National Ageing Day and National Family Day.

Secondly, the Declaration on Thailand's Older Persons was adopted by the Government, non-governmental organizations and public and social institutions to affirm commitments and obligations to better the quality of life and to promote and protect the rights of older persons.

Thirdly, the Government has set up the National Coordinating Body on Older Persons, under the Office of the Prime Minister, to be responsible for formulating policies and strategies and promoting continued and efficient coordination of affairs relating to older persons among concerned agencies.

Fourthly, forums of older persons have been arranged nationwide in the four regions for older persons to share their opinions on and attitudes towards social issues. These views serve as valuable inputs for the formulation of plans and policies for older persons in the future.

In Thailand religious institutions have played and continue to play an important role in moulding the Thai people's way of life and shaping attitudes towards compassion. Therefore, the Thai Government has been encouraging people in the community to set up citizens' organizations to manage social service centres for older persons in the community's temples throughout the country. These centres should act as the central implementing mechanisms in local areas for social services for older persons, as places where all older persons would be able to get the appropriate services from Government and non-governmental organizations. Activities organized by such community-based centres would benefit people of all ages in the community as well.

In organizing the celebration in Thailand of the International Year of Older Persons, we found to our pleasure that Thai people and various organizations are paying more attention to older persons, and they joined in activities organized both in Bangkok and in regional areas. People of all ages recognize the importance of older persons and are paying them more respect and caring for them. Older persons themselves have shown their capabilities as contributors to society by passing on their experience to the younger generations.

To build on this momentum, the Government of Thailand has formulated the following policy guidelines to assist older persons in the future. First, non-governmental organizations, foundations, associations and civil society are to be supported and encouraged to help older persons by extending access to services in rural areas. Second, as soon as possible an older person's law is to be enacted. Third, communities and societies are to be encouraged to recognize the problems of older persons. Fourth, the awareness of families and communities about how to care for older persons is to be increased by emphasizing relationships and mutual support among extended family members. Fifth, the coordinating mechanisms on ageing are to be strengthened. Sixth, a second long-term plan for older persons is to be formulated. Seventh, research studies on the elderly are to be encouraged. Eight, access to social services for older persons nationwide is to be provided by dispatching mobile units to reach older persons in communities and rural areas.

In conclusion, I would like to assure all members of the Assembly that Thailand's national economic and social development plan and the policy guidelines of organizations concerned will provide continued support for and attach high priority to the family institution, of which older persons are indeed valuable and useful assets. After all, older persons are not only the link to our past, the embodiment of our living cultural heritage, but are indeed also the repository of the collective wisdom from which our society draws as we make important decisions about our present and future.

Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine): The International Year of Older Persons comes at a time when we are witnessing a continuous increase in older persons as a proportion of the total population. In absolute terms, the number of older persons is increasing by a million per year. The world is actually seeing itself greying, demographically speaking.

This enormous growth will continue well into the twenty-first century. Statistics show that in a few generations average life expectancy could rise by another 20 years. So the population of the world is ageing.

Political developments, industrialization and advanced technologies have brought immense benefits to most of humanity — but not to all. It should, therefore, be our common goal to build a community for all generations. The International Year of Older Persons has provided an opportunity for Government decision-makers, researchers, practitioners, non-governmental organizations, community associations and the public at large to focus specifically on the status of older persons.

During this year, as we see from the Secretary-General's report (A/54/268), Governments have taken noticeable practical steps to improve the living conditions of the elderly. Now we have an opportunity to make a brief review of the progress that has been made in this area. The exchange of information and experience at the international level can effectively promote the elaboration of further long-term initiatives and strategies on ageing.

In this context, our delegation welcomes the extensive work done in this sphere by the United Nations programme on ageing and, in particular, by its director, the Coordinator of the International Year of Older Persons, Alexandre Sidorenko, our countryman. We hope that this team will successfully continue its useful work.

Let me now touch briefly on the situation in Ukraine. Like many other countries, Ukraine is experiencing the rapid ageing of its population. The current demographic situation is characterized by an increase in the number of people aged over 60. In 1960 they amounted to 13.8 per cent of the total population of Ukraine; by 1996 this figure had reached 18.6 per cent. By 2015 we expect it to reach 22 per cent. This process causes difficulties connected with general problems of our country's economic development: labour resources; the structure of medical, social and other services; financial support for older persons; their status in the family and society; the interrelationship between generations; and so forth.

In order to solve these problems the Government of Ukraine has taken practical steps aimed at promoting older people's lifelong development and well-being by launching comprehensive national programmes of actions to be carried out during the International Year of Older Persons and afterwards. These programmes combine the efforts of governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations and academic institutions.

In practical terms, we have increased pension benefits and started pension-insurance reforms. The national programme to eradicate poverty among the elderly has become an important instrument in bringing the income level of the elderly closer to the national average, which is being done by means of increased special and regular benefits.

Under the national programme to promote the health of elderly people, the Government of Ukraine has strengthened existing institutions and established new ones, thereby providing improved medical assistance to these persons. The programme is also intended to provide the elderly with the maximum possible social benefits; encourage increased productivity, improve service quality and guarantee distribution of rehabilitation resources and other goods; and improve existing attitudes with regard to the elderly. The Government has provided the elderly with free and unrestricted access to medical assistance, and continues to enact legislation granting them health care privileges. The programme facilitated the improvement of the coordination of the activities of central and local state authorities, as well as those of enterprises, organizations and unions dealing with different aspects of the problem of the elderly.

Among other measures, the Government and local authorities have established policies that promote the production of food and other necessities for the elderly. In addition, the Government of Ukraine provides special social services for the elderly, with a particular focus on the disabled.

In Ukraine the problem of the elderly is also viewed from the gender perspective. In this connection, I would like to point out an important feature that has developed in our country over the last decade. In Ukraine the difference between the average lifespan of men and women has substantially increased, to the point where the average lifespan of women is now about 12 years longer. Hence, the ratio of older women is steadily growing. At the same time, statistics show that women are poorer than men in old age and more often need extra medical attention.

Without going deep into the underlying causes of this phenomenon, it is worth mentioning that this circumstance prompted our Government to undertake a number of extra measures in order to adjust the system of health care and medical services for the elderly, as well as the work of numerous social institutions, to meet the needs of the increasing number of women among the elderly. While this adjustment process is still in progress, it is now clear that it requires additional funds and resources, which are in deficit in a country with its economy in transition. Nevertheless, we will continue to take steps aimed at finding an effective solution to this problem.

Recent developments in our demographic situation have raised fundamental questions regarding an adequate policy towards older persons and highlighted the need for new approaches in this domain. Of course, the provision of social security and similar conventional services and benefits is of great importance. At the same time, it would not, perhaps, suffice to change the situation for the better in any important way.

We must therefore continue both the provision of care and income security and the pursuit of strategies to protect the rights of this group of people. In doing so, we should take decisive action in order to move towards a society of policies focused on self-help and independence of the elderly, in which they would become active members of society.

In this regard, Ukraine welcomes the series of important initiatives of the United Nations Secretariat to support the development of the long-term perspective strategy on ageing, including convening in the year 2002 a conference to review the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing. We also support the proposal to revise the 20-year old Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, to adapt it to the changing conditions and adjust it to meet new challenges. We hope that adequate resources will also be provided for this purpose.

Old age is the future of us all and by creating new opportunities for the elderly and more favourable conditions of life for the aged, we are thinking first of all of ourselves. The rhetorical question written almost two centuries ago by the famous English poet George Lord Byron — "What is the worst of woes that wait on Age?" — should be left in the past.

Mr. Balanandan (India): Let me begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation for the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the International Year of Older Persons. We are particularly pleased at the scientific approach taken for the further follow-up of issues related to ageing. We thank the Government of Spain for its offer to host a second world assembly on ageing in 2002.

We believe that ageing should not be looked upon as a problem that societies must face. We need not be alarmed by the process of what is termed the "greying" of societies. This is a natural phenomenon which calls for societal adjustments and reorientation in which everybody can contribute productively for the ultimate benefit of mankind. I would venture to say that, more than a society for all ages, what we need to work for is an encompassing society for all mankind in which the young and the old, the strong and the weak, the able and the

disabled, the child and the parent each obtain equal opportunities for productive contribution, enhanced human relations and fulfilment of aspirations.

We do not believe in the stereotype of age. We do not believe that a human being is antique when old and a novelty when young. The eminent philosopher and second President of India, Mr. S. Radhakrishnan, said:

> "We do not grow old by living a certain number of years. We grow old if we lose our ideals, if we become immune to change. Years may wrinkle the skin; the soul is wrinkled if we give up love and loyalty. Whether we are 20 or 70, we are young as long as we have in our heart the spirit of wonder, of curiosity, the challenge to life and the joy of adventure."

My country's view of age is therefore based not on a numerical addition of years, but on an integrated process of learning through experience. This has been enunciated in our civilization through two composites: knowledge and abilities. Constant improvement in both leads to a productive compact called *jeevana* — life which is neither young nor old but a continuum of actions. In our philosophy we do not go by the years of survival, but by our contribution — by whether what we have done survives after us. We do not segment by the hourglass; we do not fragment life into years. It is this life-oriented view of age that prompts us to look at plans and programmes for the elderly as an integrated whole in which lifelong individual development is fostered.

While this view of society has influenced all our development activities, a stronger integration of age in our policies was introduced in the early 1990s through a number of affirmative actions. We started a scheme in 1992 to promote the welfare of the aged through a nationwide network of non-governmental organizations. The Government provides direct financial assistance to non-governmental organizations and other voluntary organizations to set up and run day-care centres, old age homes, mobile medicare and non-institutional services. These services are rendered to pensioners and to persons above 60 years who are from the non-formal sector. Ninety per cent of the expenditures borne by the non-governmental organizations come from government grants and the balance is raised through contributions and donations. In tribal areas, the Government grant is 95 per cent. Voluntary organizations financed by the Government appoint social workers to help the elderly in legal, banking and tax matters. In addition, they are helped to get access to special medical facilities. Between 1992 and 1998, the Government of India spent an equivalent of $10 million on this scheme.

In 1997, we also embarked upon a scheme through the grass-roots administrative system of the village councils, aiming to establish at least one old-age home per district throughout the country. To assist in their construction, the Government has been granting an equivalent of $12,000 for each unit. We do realize, however, that much more needs to be done and are formulating a national policy for older persons, which should be completed soon.

Whatever we do at the "macro" level of policies to improve the life of the individual, such policies are rooted in and grow from the value systems of each society. The last 200 years have seen the release of vast productive capacities, bringing with them great changes in social mores and values. In particular, rural-urban displacements have helped bring down the old order of family values and replace it with a society oriented to self and not community. But, as we move into the next century and a new millennium — when, according to the Secretary-General's report (A/54/268), one in every five persons in the world will be an older person — let us consciously reorient our thinking of life: one integrated whole, not age-denominated partitions. Productive endeavours at later stages in life, greater interpersonal co-relations through new communication technologies, a better and greener environment, greater freedom to travel and see other civilizations — all those will make life richer and worth living.

Ms. Viken (Norway): The International Year of Older Persons 1999 has been warmly welcomed both by the Norwegian Government and by the Norwegian non-governmental organizations. The International Year, on the eve of the millennium, has been a significant event for demonstrating the importance of older peoples' contribution to and potential in our societies and the benefits of active and healthy ageing.

How Norway has marked the Year has been coordinated by a national committee, with members from the Government and from the non-governmental organization sector. The chairman is the Minister of Social Affairs. The main focus has been on the situation of older persons, lifelong learning and solidarity between generations. Cooperation with the Baltic States and north-west Russia and the situation of older persons there have also been priority issues.

The Norwegian Government highlighted the international dimension of the International Year by hosting a conference in Oslo on participation by older persons. The conference drew participants from the Nordic countries, the Baltic countries, Russia and the European Commission, and also from many European non-governmental organizations. Two elements played a central role in this seminar: senior-citizen councils and voluntary work. I believe that both elements can be key factors in increasing participation by older persons.

The main ambition of the Norwegian national committee, however, has been to stimulate activities at regional and local levels in my country. Grants have been made available for innovative, inter-organizational projects. The partner non-governmental organizations in the International Year have made substantial efforts to stimulate activities for and with older persons. Among the most successful projects in terms of creating solidarity between generations is cooperation between schools and activity centres for older persons on information technology. One of the main national events that took place during the Year has been an "older people's week", which included a broad range of activities by and for older persons. The Year was brought to a successful end at a televised gala performance on 1 October. Her Majesty the Queen, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Social Affairs and 900 people from all over Norway attended the performance.

The main challenge now is to follow up the attention and ambitions created by the International Year. Our focus on this issue should remain in line with the 1991 United Nations Principles for Older Persons (General Assembly resolution 46/91, annex). Older persons should remain integrated within society, be perceived as a resource, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that affect their well-being and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations. Being old does not necessarily mean being sick and helpless, as the Norwegian sociologist, Professor Gunhild Hagestad, pointed out in her keynote address at the launching of the International Year here at the United Nations on 1 October last year; the promotion of active ageing should be a cornerstone of our future efforts.

Let me say a few words about the challenges we face in Norway. The most important task will be to increase our capacity for providing care for frail older persons. The Norwegian Government has embarked on an ambitious four-year plan to improve the care of older persons. The core objectives of the plan are to provide nursing and care services which ensure that the elderly live secure, worthy and independent lives, to ensure that elderly persons can live in their own homes or in sheltered housing for as long as possible, and to provide sufficient capacity to ensure that services are available when and where needed.

The tight labour market in Norway and the demographic developments ahead make it necessary to prevent too early retirement from the labour force. To the benefit of retired persons, the Norwegian Government has recently implemented a significant increase in the minimum pension.

Norway strongly supports the increased participation of the United Nations system in ageing-related events and research. We welcome the attention of both the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women to the issues of the social integration and participation of older persons. The special sessions of the General Assembly next year in connection with the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women will surely expand on these efforts. Furthermore, the activities of the United Nations funds and programmes in the ageing and development area are proving instrumental in the follow-up to the International Year. In its development cooperation work, Norway gives high priority to the social sector, including support for basic health services. Primary health care targets vulnerable groups, including older persons.

I feel confident that we can all learn from each other in the follow-up to the International Year. I also feel confident that the United Nations will remain a useful platform in this respect, as well as in connection with the International Year of Volunteers in 2001.

We must all make an effort to be prepared for the new millennium with policies and solutions capable of fulfilling the objectives of the International Year of Older Persons. We all have a responsibility to contribute to the creation of a genuine society for all ages in all countries.

Mrs. Aponte de Zacklin (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Venezuela fully supports the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and is pleased to join in the expressions of gratitude to Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez for her extraordinary contribution to policies benefiting older persons.

Venezuela is also very pleased to participate in the commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme "Towards a society for all ages".

The great international interest in the question of ageing is clearly shown by the activities which have been carried out to attain the objective of creating "a society for all ages", a society that, as the Secretary-General has said, does not characterize the elderly as pensioners, but regards them as both agents and beneficiaries of development.

In the final decades of the twentieth century the "silent revolution" began — in other words, the rapid ageing of the population and the uncontrollable demographic changes that will extend into the next millennium. Although ageing is a global phenomenon, its rate of increase has been faster in developing countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean, demographic statistics from the Caribbean centre with responsibility in that field indicate that the proportion of those over 60 in the population increased from 6 per cent to 7.9 per cent in the last decade, and will rise again over the next 25 years, to 14 per cent.

Another significant fact, according to Martha Peláez, regional adviser on ageing and health of the Pan American Health Organization, is that in countries throughout the world, ageing is above all a question of gender, and the Latin America and Caribbean region is no exception. However, in this region the situation is characterized by widespread levels of poverty that make women more vulnerable as a result, *inter alia*, of their greater inability to acquire economic resources. Thus, it is important that policies designed to deal with questions of the ageing of the population at the global level take into account the specific needs of women, but it is important also to make sure that the policies adopted for developing countries be very different from those which are appropriate in developed countries.

The Government of Venezuela, through its long-term programme, the Bolivar Plan 2000 and the Economic Transition Programme 1999-2000, is consolidating the conditions for an economy favouring social justice and thus benefiting all social groups. To commemorate the International Year of Older Persons, Venezuela's National Institute of Geriatrics and Gerontology (INAGER), our main body dealing with older persons, held a programme of activities. These included the first days for the modernization of geriatric therapy, for more than a hundred doctors working in geriatric and gerontological units of INAGER, held in Caracas from 30 September to 2 October. I would also like to mention the Week of Older Persons, arranged in cooperation with the country's most important non-governmental organizations.

Within the framework of social action, coordinated efforts are being made by the Government and civil society to achieve the common well-being of all members of Venezuelan society. In this connection, and in connection with the goals related to dealing with older persons in the family, the basic unit of social organization, we feel it relevant to mention the ideas expressed by the First Lady of the Republic in her statement at the United Nations to commemorate the International Day of Families, which included the need to strengthen families through promoting the repositioning of the family as an instrument for improving the world and life.

Another idea was that the unity of children, adults and the elderly, irrespective of the connections and the characteristics of the home that bring them together, has a potential that is not always seen by social action organizations and their methods and that this comes within the concept of "a society for all ages".

Ageing, seen overall, is in its individual dimension a life-long process. Efforts to achieve the social, economic and spiritual well-being of members of society of advanced ages are therefore the concern of everyone and attaining this objective benefits all humanity.

The celebration of the International Year has thus enabled us to think not only about the dialogue between generations in the conceptual framework of "a society for all ages", but also about people's necessary, in-depth, intimate and sincere internal dialogue.

In conclusion, human beings have always hoped to prolong their lives, and this hope has been accompanied by the illusion of eternal youth. These desires are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. We will be eternally young in our hearts if we live with dignity until the end of our days, if we feel useful to society and, in particular, if we can share our individual, unique, singular experience — experience which, however, we have gained from that great universal book entitled "Life".

Mrs. Fritsche (Liechtenstein): The adoption by the General Assembly of the International Plan of Action on Ageing in December 1982 marked the beginning of a new awareness about the ageing process from birth

throughout the life cycle. Since then the questions of promoting active ageing, as well as ensuring fuller participation and better quality of care in old age, have gradually been introduced to the agenda of several United Nations bodies and agencies, culminating in the declaration of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons.

It is of particular relevance to recognize that the longevity revolution is changing the concept of ageing. Over past years, the world's population has continually moved from a state of high birth and death rates to one characterized by low birth and death rates. The number and proportion of older persons has increased at an unprecedented rate. While in 1950 the number of persons aged 60 or older was 200 million, it is today almost 550 million, and in about the year 2020, the world's ageing population will reach 1 billion. It is also expected that the major increase in the world's older persons will occur in the less-developed countries and that women will continue to make up the majority of older persons all over the world.

Extended longevity, which, along with declining fertility, is the universal cause of population ageing, affects both society and individuals. There are many implications for society, including patterns of production, labour market conditions and services required. However, the negative aspects of ageing, such as the increased costs of providing social services and benefits, are often emphasized, while the valuable contribution that older persons can make to society is ignored.

While the majority of older persons continues to lead healthy and productive lives, the risk of dependency grows with increasing age. Traditional support systems for older persons are challenged today. Due to demographic development, the ratio between older persons and available younger family caregivers is declining and traditional family support patterns are eroding. It remains therefore the responsibility of Governments to design policies to provide care for dependent older persons and to support those who provide such care.

In this context it is important to note that women's increased participation in the labour force will inevitably lead to conflicting demands on women who face the double and triple burden of child care, elder care and personal career. The workplace is therefore a critical site for providing assistance to employees who are also caregivers.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/54/268, which highlights some of the activities undertaken on the national level as well as by non-governmental organizations and within the United Nations system. I would like to point out some of the promotional and outreach activities which have taken place or will still take place within the programme for observing and celebrating the International Year of Older Persons in Liechtenstein.

The National Contact and Advisory Committee on Ageing initiated the "Platform for generations", which serves as a multigenerational forum to exchange views on how to achieve a good quality of life regardless of age. The national Association of Older Persons, in cooperation with the national police and a private security company, published a brochure designed to make older persons aware of risks and dangers in daily life and to advise them on preventive measures. The national radio broadcast a programme series between June and September of this year on questions of ageing. The National Contact and Advisory Committee on Ageing is offering courses for people who wish to serve as communicators in a bridging function between generations. In January 2000, an expert meeting will discuss problems of ageing, and participants will include older persons themselves, national care institutions and politicians.

We look back on a century during which people's life expectancy increased dramatically and age structures of societies underwent profound changes. These developments will extend into the coming century and will require further action. We express our hope that "A society for all ages" will become a social reality soon.

In conclusion, I would like to thank in particular Ambassador Julia Alvarez for her valuable contributions in transforming the idea of an International Year of Older Persons into reality, as well as Mr. Aurelio Fernández, Counsellor for Social Affairs at the Permanent Mission of Spain, for his work.

Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland): We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on this important issue, which we think yields important information for Member States, and we concur with its findings.

Icelandic authorities have done their utmost to enhance the visibility of the issues facing the elderly in today's society. An executive committee for the Year of the Elderly was established in Iceland for this purpose, as well as to plan events and projects. The focus of the committee's work was on four main aspects relating to

the elderly: education, economic matters, social affairs and health.

One of the projects was to have a study made on the standard of living and way of life of senior citizens in Iceland including, as far as possible, comparisons with other age groups and other countries. The study was based on data collected during the period 1988 to 1999.

According to the study, poverty has diminished considerably among senior citizens in Iceland during the last ten years. Looking at the senior citizens' way of life, it is evident that in Iceland this group is very active in the labour market and in society in general, compared to neighbouring countries. Senior citizens' participation in the labour market in Iceland is indeed exceptionally high compared to that of other Western societies, indicating that this group is still taking a very active part in society.

Senior citizens follow the mass media, radio and television news programmes, for example, more than younger people. They also read newspapers to a greater extent. They are active in community life and engage in a variety of leisure activities, which is important to prevent exclusion from society.

Senior citizens have a decidedly different outlook on life than younger people. They tend more towards religious observance and are more religious in general. They place more importance on social welfare, have a more positive attitude towards work, are more loyal to employers and have a stronger sense of morality than younger generations.

The conclusions of the study will be used as a basis for future policy-making in matters relating to the elderly.

Finally, we concur with the Secretary-General's recommendations that Governments should expand their approaches to individual ageing, complementing care and security for older persons with measures that promote active participation of the elderly in society.

Mrs. Brobbey (Ghana): The Ghana delegation are honoured to address the General Assembly and to associate ourselves with the statement on the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77.

The United Nations World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982, brought into sharp focus the ageing of the world's population, with its attendant challenges to society. The ageing of the world's population is so rapid that today the population aged 60 years or older is estimated to be nearly 600 million, and it is projected to grow to almost 2 billion by the year 2050, when the population of older persons will be larger than the population of children. However, the increase will be more dramatic in the developing world, where the population aged 60 years or over will grow from 350 million in 1998 to almost 1.6 billion in 2050.

Because of that development, Ghana welcomed the General Assembly's decision in 1992 to observe the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, and the subsequent launching of the Year on 1 October 1998 by the Secretary-General with the theme "A society for all ages". The appropriateness of this theme cannot be overemphasized, given the tendency to neglect the aged and relegate their needs and aspirations to the background, even in societies like ours, where the aged are regarded as repositories of wisdom.

Migration from the rural areas, where the greater proportion of the aged live, has adversely affected the patterns of social interaction and relationships within the traditional family system in Ghana. Consequently, older persons in Ghana are showing signs of loneliness and neglect. We are therefore convinced that a society that caters for all ages, as envisaged by the international community, would indeed tailor its structures, policies and plans to meet the needs and capabilities of all, thereby releasing the potential of all, including the aged, for the benefit of all.

In pursuance of this goal, the Government of Ghana has drafted a national policy on ageing which aims at promoting the social integration of older persons in order to enable them to participate fully in society. Within this context, the Government is committed to the eradication of poverty among older persons and their families through the provision of income-generation and job-creation activities such as the employment of older persons in the teaching of skill development programmes in crafts like pottery and weaving. Income-generating projects targeted at women include employing active older women as childcare providers in daycare centres for children. This policy is designed to differ from conventional arrangements, where the focus is on providing care to older persons, in order to give the latter an opportunity of active involvement in productive social life. It is an important tool to foster intergenerational relationships.

The Government, in collaboration with Help Age Ghana, a non-governmental organization, has established the first daycare centre for older persons and plans to open more centres to share the responsibility for the care of older family members. This policy would encourage continued family support while relieving the family of some of the burdens of caring for the aged.

The Government is also considering substantive tax breaks and subsidies for the support of older persons. This policy is intended to give concessions, relief and encouragement to family members who live and care for the older members of their families, and also to preserve the traditional formal system of social welfare and support, as well as intergenerational relationships. We are, however, aware that a durable solution to the poverty that plagues the aged in our society is to reform our social security system by broadening its scope to take care of the huge percentage of the population in the informal sector, such as petty traders, fishermen and farmers. In this connection, we have included in our policy a lifelong development programme for a better livelihood in the latter stages of the individuals's life. The policy seeks to promote lifelong learning and healthy lifestyles, which, if properly implemented, would offer the youth of today security, autonomy and protection in their old age.

As part of the celebration of the International Year of Older Persons, the Government launched the Year in March with education campaigns throughout the country to raise awareness of the plight of the aged in our society. A programme of interaction between young people and the aged has been put in place by the Government and Help Age Ghana. Schoolchildren visit the aged in their communities on Sundays to either learn from them or help them with their house chores. The Government now offers free medical services to the aged.

The Republic Day of Ghana was declared "Senior Citizens Day", with *durbars* and receptions held in honour of all senior citizens. In this vein, President Jerry Rawlings hosted some senior citizens at a luncheon, where he expressed appreciation for their good work, noting "Without your dedication, Ghana would not be where it is now".

Finally, we hope that the dedication of the international community to the well-being of the aged will be sustained in the next millennium.

Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are pleased to participate in these special meetings of the General Assembly to commemorate the International Year of Older Persons. This Year is due tribute to older persons, who without a doubt make up a valuable sector of society.

We must recognize our historical debt to older persons. Their achievements, successes and lessons have created the society in which we live and are the basis for our own achievements. We must also recognize their current value and their individual dignity, the contributions that they can still make to society, the lessons they can teach us, their extensive experience and wisdom, their compassion and their understanding.

However, we note with concern the particular challenges that older people face and the problems of health and poverty that threaten them. It is therefore necessary to recognize, protect and promote the dignity of older persons and to provide them with the best possible conditions of life so that they can fully fulfil themselves as individuals. We believe that it is essential to adopt effective measures to ensure their economic and social security as well as to give them ample opportunities to contribute to national development.

In this context, my delegation is pleased to reiterate Costa Rica's commitment to the follow-up and implementation of the International Plan of Action adopted in 1982 by the World Assembly on Ageing. In this regard, we support the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Costa Rica has carried out a number of concrete measures directed towards implementing the Principles contained in the International Plan of Action and in resolution 46/91. We recognize the contributions that the elderly make to Costa Rican society, and we have noted the wide range of difficult situations facing older people and the need to provide adequate policy responses. We have endeavoured to accord them recognition and to guarantee them the dignity, participation, independence and right to full development to which they are entitled.

Lastly, we have taken the necessary measures to provide them with the special care they require. The First Lady of Costa Rica, Mrs. Lorena Clare de Rodríguez, has participated actively, together with a national commission, in the launching of the International Year of Older Persons. A high-level forum of national authorities was held aimed at elaborating a number of programmes directed specifically at older persons. A study was carried

out on the situation of this segment of the population, national programmes were reviewed and a national time-table prepared for the activities to be carried out in this connection.

The various services provided to older persons in Costa Rica include multidisciplinary health-care teams comprising geriatric specialists, gerontologists, social workers, nurses, dentists and so on. These professionals provide support networks with social participation as part of a joint effort between the governmental and non-governmental sectors to provide integrated care for the elderly. This programme has been particularly successful.

Also in the area of health care, an off-site assistance programme has been launched that provides training for officials and the elderly and their families with respect to the basic health needs of that segment of the population. The programme provides wide coverage at a low cost. In addition, local committees have been established to care for the elderly, with guidance from the national geriatric hospital. We also have national and local agencies that provide care for older persons in case of abuse or abandonment. A "golden-age" programme has also been set up through which elderly persons receive special treatment in banks, public transportation and commercial establishments. To this end they are provided with special identification cards.

In order to promote a society for all ages, and in particular to improve relations between young people and the elderly, a condition has been set for the granting of fellowships that requires young people to provide services to older persons. It is felt that communication and apprenticeship between these two groups will benefit both segments of the population.

In this connection, the Office of the First Lady has submitted a bill to the Legislative Assembly for consideration and adoption whose aim is to consolidate existing achievements and adopt additional measures.

For all of these reasons, we are very pleased to support the draft resolution submitted to this special meeting of the General Assembly, a draft that we are co-sponsoring with great interest. We hope that it will be adopted by consensus with a view to contributing to the establishment of a society for all ages and to the well-being of the older persons of the world, who are in such need of this and who will so greatly appreciate it.

Lastly, we must recognize the important role played by Ambassador Julia Alvarez of the Dominican Republic in the launching of the International Year of Older Persons 1999 on 1 October 1998. We wish also to express appreciation for the cooperation of the Department of Public Information and the non-governmental Committee on Ageing.

Mr. Prosser (Australia): Australia has been a strong supporter of the International Year of Older Persons. We have warmly embraced the concept within Australia, and in so doing have been proud to contribute to the international efforts to promote the objectives of the year, as encapsulated in the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, and covering the key areas of independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

Australia believes that older persons have a critical role to play in the development of society. They should be viewed as active participants in the global community who have an important contribution to make to the community rather than persons who are dependent on society for care and respite.

Recognition of the legitimate and valuable role of older people in society is increasingly important as the average age of the older population increases. As recent statistics show, the average age of life expectancy is on the increase. On a global scale, more than one in 10 persons are now over the age of 60. This ratio will increase further in the coming years.

In Australia too, the age of our population is increasing. In the next 20 years the number of people in Australia aged 80 years and over is expected to grow by 63 per cent, from just under 500,000 people in 1996 to about 850,000, or one in four, by 2016.

The Australian Government recognizes the important and valuable contribution older persons make to our society at the political, community and family levels. Within Australia we have considered the International Year of Older Persons as an important opportunity to promote a nationwide approach to the issues of ageing, to celebrate the diversity and richness of our older population, and to acknowledge their ongoing contribution to society. In Australia, as in other countries, the International Year has also provided the opportunity and the impetus to work actively to change the way Australians perceive older people and ageing.

We all know that shifting attitudes is a fundamental factor in bringing about real change in society.

Australia has taken its commitment to the International Year of Older Persons seriously. We commenced our preparations early. During 1998 extensive community consultations were undertaken with older people in a variety of locations across Australia to ensure that the Government's policy framework for the year reflected the key issues of importance to these people.

Ten major themes emerged from these community consultations. These ranged from health and well-being to employment and education. These provided the basis for the Federal Government's priorities and projects during 1999. The 10 themes were incorporated into the terms of reference for the Government's key policy response to the International Year — a National Strategy for an Ageing Australia.

I am pleased to report that under the management of the Minister for Aged Care, The Honourable Bronwyn Bishop MP, the National Strategy for an Ageing Australia has formed the basis for the development of a series of practical and innovative initiatives and activities which have been designed to promote, recognize and encourage the role of older people in our society.

Major national initiatives have included a national "Active Australia" media campaign which promotes the benefits of activity for older Australians; a national information programme to inform older Australians about new technology associated with electronic banking; and a project developed by the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business to assist and promote mature-age job seekers.

In the field of education, funding has been provided for national programmes such as the International Year of Older Persons Learning Circles Project, which is aimed at developing a programme in each state and territory to offer older Australians the opportunity to take part in small, informal discussions and learning groups on a variety of topics.

Australia has designed a national Recognition Award for Senior Australians and a national Government Senior Australian of the Year Award, thereby creating what we believe may be the first awards of their kind. These awards recognize the invaluable contribution of senior Australians to the community. The Government Senior Australian of the Year Award was announced by the Prime Minister on 30 September 1999, the eve of the International Day of Older Persons. The recipient of the award, Slim Dusty, is a well-known Australian country music singer who relates well to all groups of Australians and has been recording country music hits for over 50 years. At 72 years of age, he ignores retirement and continues to do what he loves: performing, travelling and recording music to share with others. However, more importantly, Slim Dusty is also known for his philanthropic activities, which involve visiting the sick, playing at concerts for those less fortunate and working with the Australian Heart Foundation.

Under the Recognition Awards Programme initiative, the community has been encouraged to nominate for an award senior Australians who are outstanding role models in the local community. In each electorate, up to 20 senior Australians who have made a significant contribution to their local community will be selected to receive Recognition Awards. The most outstanding award winner from each electorate will be invited to attend a number of special celebratory events in mid-November 1999 in Australia's capital city, Canberra.

As part of a comprehensive communication strategy, the Minister for Aged Care recently released a kit which provided communities at the local level with a range of information about the International Year of Older Persons and the implementation of associated activities. A national International Year of Older Persons newsletter and Web site have also been developed. The Royal Australian Mint has officially launched a six-coin collector's set with an International Year of Older Persons $1 coin. Australia Post has released two 45 cent stamps to commemorate the Year.

In the health field, the Healthy Ageing Task Force has developed a coordinated nationwide approach to healthy ageing and the International Year of Older Persons. The Task Force includes representatives from the federal, state and territory governments of Australia. It has produced a draft national healthy ageing strategy aimed at identifying challenges for government, business, the community and individuals, to meet the needs of Australians as they age.

Complementing these initiatives, the Australian Government has worked to encourage widespread community involvement in the International Year of Older Persons. Within an overall budget of close to 11 million Australian dollars allocated for International Year

of Older Persons activities, the Government has provided $A 560,000 to establish the Australian Coalition '99, a nationwide network of more than 1,100 non-governmental organizations whose membership is drawn from, and that are focused on, the ageing population.

Australian Coalition '99 has provided an important framework and coordinated activities and events for the International Year of Older Persons in the community. The Coalition has proved to be a dynamic force behind Australian initiatives to promote the International Year. It has also laid a firm foundation within the community for the long-term promotion of the objectives of the International Year of Older Persons.

Australia has a deep commitment to working actively to develop an integrated society in which older people are not discriminated against because of their age. It is important that we continue to recognize that the wisdom and contribution of the older Australian is the foundation and strength of our society. The activities and initiatives I have described in connection with the International Year of Older Persons have provided a firm basis for bringing about a real change in Australia's perceptions of older persons. We recognize that this is an ongoing process and that it is up to both the Government and the community to maintain the momentum.

At the global level, as in Australia, it is important also to ensure that the momentum for change does not cease when the year draws to a close on 31 December 1999. To this end, we support the holding of a global meeting in 2002 to review the outcome of the first World Assembly on Ageing. Australia expects to be able to report on the implementation of its National Strategy for an Ageing Australia at that global meeting.

Mr. Bundhun (Mauritius): I am deeply pleased and honoured to participate, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius, in the plenary meetings of the United Nations General Assembly devoted specifically to the International Year of Older Persons. Let me, at the very outset, take this opportunity to convey to you, Mr. President, and to all the delegations present in this Assembly, the warmest greetings of my Government and the people of Mauritius, in particular our elderly persons.

My delegation would like to join other delegations in saluting the commendable initiative taken by the General Assembly to devote four plenary meetings at its fifty-fourth session to enabling Member States to report on the observance of the International Year of Older Persons. This in itself testifies to the unflinching determination of the international community to provide greater attention to the conditions of our elderly.

It is indeed very sad to recall here that, like other vulnerable groups in our society, such as women and children, the elderly population usually has to bear the brunt of the harsh realities of socio-economic development or the undesirable consequences of natural calamities, conflicts and terrors of war. Unfortunately, this is the current situation in several countries which, on account of various circumstances, are unable to provide adequate attention to the elderly population. On the other hand, over the years there has been a growing tendency to overlook the significant contribution of our elderly in the forging of the socio-economic development of our respective countries and, above all, in enabling the world to attain an unprecedented level of progress and development in almost all fields, whether economic, technological or scientific, over the span of a few decades in the course of this century.

It is in recognition of the exceptional role played by our elders in the making of this modern world that all Member States and the world at large should pay tribute to our elderly population and should strive together, through national and international collaboration, towards creating the appropriate conditions for the well-being of our elders, particularly the less fortunate and vulnerable ones.

While the International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted at the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, succeeded in arousing world awareness on the ageing issue, there is currently an urgent need to review that Plan in order to take into account the socio-economic changes which have taken place over the past 20 years. We therefore welcome the proposal to convene a second World Assembly in 2002 with a view to adopting a revised plan of action and a long-term strategy on ageing in the context of a society for all ages.

I am extremely delighted to be given the opportunity to share with other delegations the efforts made by my country for the observance of the International Year of Older Persons. As a matter of fact, since October 1998, the Government of Mauritius has set up a National Organizing Committee under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare, made up of all the sectors concerned, to work out the necessary preparations for the implementation of a programme of activities to mark the celebration of the

year. In order to show the determination of the Government in promoting the interest of the elderly population, our Prime Minister personally launched the programme of activities in January, and the ceremony was broadcast live on television for our elderly population and the public at large.

The programme provides for the implementation of a number of activities with a view to sensitizing the population on the issue of ageing and to providing opportunities for the social integration of our elderly. The programme relates mainly to the introduction of leisure and recreational activities for the elderly at all social-welfare and community centres located in various parts of the country; regional meetings with the participation of some 25,000 elderly persons; essay competitions in schools and colleges on the theme of the elderly so as to sensitize the younger generation about the need to show respect and provide care for our elders; talks on intergenerational solidarity to emphasize the need for greater collaboration among generations; trade fairs by the elderly to highlight the potential of our elderly population; the issue of a special commemorative cover by the Government Post Office; a medical week, in the course of which a national campaign was launched regarding the health service facilities available to the elderly; song and dance competitions to encourage the participation of the elderly in social activities; and the hosting of an international meeting of the Fédération Internationale des Associations de Personnes Agées. In the course of the meeting, discussions were centred on strategies to cope with the ageing phenomenon and on the need to set up a Federation of Senior Citizens Associations in the Indian Ocean region.

The activities also included a meeting of all centenarians with the President of the Republic of Mauritius at the State House, at which some 20 centenarians were present — this might have been a unique event in the world; opening of a museum and archives featuring the various facets of life of our elders from their arrival as immigrants; an open day for our institutions providing residential care to the elderly; story-telling competitions; and a special get-together for elderly couples who have lived 50 years or more of married life together.

In addition to those activities, a number of firms in the private sector have agreed, in the context of the International Year of Older Persons, to provide facilities to our elderly such as: reduced prices for cinema tickets; reduced entry fees at nature parks; reduced bus prices for outings; special packages for travelling to dependency islands; and reserved seats in buses. I am particularly pleased to report that all these activities have been successfully implemented, with the participation of some 450 senior citizens associations representing some 25,000 elderly persons.

Moreover, since the proclamation in 1992 of 1 October as the International Day of Older Persons, the Government of Mauritius has been organizing on that day every year special recreational activities on public beaches around the country, with the participation of some 20,000 senior citizens. On 1 October of this year, which is the last of this century, we organized a national exhibition on the elderly, featuring photos, utensils, traditional dresses, musical instruments and other items which have been used by our elders in the past. We are planning to proceed in November with the opening of a recreation centre for the elderly, which will be of international standard and which will provide residential accommodation for about 150 persons at a time. This recreation centre will be unique in the Indian Ocean region.

We are also proposing to introduce in the very near future appropriate legislation to generally protect the rights of the elderly and to ensure that our elderly residing in homes receive the required care within acceptable norms. A senior citizens welfare fund will also be set up soon with a view to providing emergency assistance to needy elderly persons who are unable to meet the basic necessities of life. In this connection, a *comité de sages* will also be set up at every social welfare and community centre in order to identify those needy elderly requiring such assistance.

It is worth mentioning here that, following a cabinet reshuffle about a week ago, our Prime Minister has officially added to my responsibilities the welfare of the elderly, changing the name of my ministry from the Ministry of Social Security and National Solidarity to the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens' Welfare. This addition was made in recognition of the increasing importance attached by the Government of Mauritius to the issue of the elderly, especially in the context of the International Year of Older Persons. However, I must emphasize that, well before the advent of the International Year of Older Persons, the Government of Mauritius had for a number of years been very attentive to the social needs of our elderly persons and has been providing them with adequate support and protection in terms of: a monthly non-contributory pension payable on a universal basis to every citizen aged 60 years and above; payment of an

additional monthly pension to elderly persons requiring constant personal care and attention; the setting up of senior citizens' associations around the country to promote the organization of recreational and leisure activities for the elderly; organization throughout the year of a number of activities such as outings and residential holiday camps; facilities such as rebates on air fares, reduced fees for the issuance of passports, exemptions from payment of airport tax, half fare for bus travel, home visits for those aged 90 and above, issue of blankets and assistive devices to disabled elderly people; and provision of a cash gift and support for the one-hundredth birthday celebrations of our centenarians, whose present number is 38 and is expected to reach 45 by the end of the year.

In addition, over the past four years, the Government has introduced new policy measures to consolidate further existing social support schemes so as to reduce inequalities and provide greater protection for the elderly population. In this respect, since 1996, my Government has granted an increase of more than 100 per cent in the non-contributory pensions payable to the elderly population. A project for the renovation of charitable institutions providing residential care to the elderly has also been under way, in collaboration with the Luxembourg Government, since last year. The project, costing 52 million Mauritian rupees, comprises the modernization of equipment, the training of staff and the renovation of these institutions with a view to improving the quality of life of their inmates.

Increasing efforts are also being made to sensitize the population on the ageing issue, which is becoming a serious concern to many countries. In fact, the world population of persons over 60 years of age has increased rapidly and is expected to reach 616 million in 2000 and 1.2 billion in 2025. Mauritius is no exception to this phenomenon. The proportion of persons aged 60 and above has increased from 6 per cent of the total population in 1972 to 9.6 per cent at present, and is expected to reach 19 per cent by the year 2025. As in many other countries, this phenomenon of ageing is expected to have serious socio-economic implications, mainly in terms of increased social security benefits and public sector pensions and increased expenditure on health care and housing. We have already started to address this complex issue with the preparation of a white paper on ageing containing a number of proposals and measures for implementation over the coming years. This white paper is currently under serious consideration by a high-level ministerial committee.

The Government of Mauritius is deeply committed to promoting the welfare of the elderly population. In fact, this commitment is inherent in the history of our country, which has made significant socio-economic progress over the span of a century thanks to the dedication, hard work and spirit of sacrifice of our forefathers, who were brought from other shores to settle in our country. We have therefore never spared any effort to pay tribute to the valuable contribution of our forefathers in making our country achieve a worldwide reputation in terms of socio-economic progress, peace, stability and respect for human rights.

In the context of the International Year of Older Persons, it is only fitting that we pay due recognition to the contribution of our elders in the development of our countries and in the safeguard of our traditions, values and cultures, which are so important for our national stability. Let us therefore take advantage of their valuable experience and let their sense of dedication, their spirit of sacrifice and their moral values be a permanent source of inspiration to us, and particularly to our younger generation.

Despite being a small country, Mauritius is extremely delighted to be able share with other Member States its encouraging experience with regard to the care and support schemes provided for its elderly population. In the spirit of the theme of the International Year of Older Persons — "Towards a society for all ages" — let our young generation, in a gesture of intergenerational solidarity, open up their arms towards our elders and provide them with the required support.

May I now conclude by reaffirming the commitment of my Government to attaining the goals and objectives set out by the United Nations in the context of the observance of the International Year of Older Persons.

Mr. Boisson (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): In all human societies, older persons have occupied an essential, even a dominant, place. Historians, ethnologists, sociologists all agree: older persons represented, even in the most ancient civilizations sources of inspiration, wisdom and judgement. They were esteemed and respected, their words heeded. Their life experience often served as reference points for the conduct of affairs in the community, the village or the city. Their status has declined over the years, until the elderly became isolated, sometimes even excluded from society.

Doubtless changing lifestyles may partly explain this phenomenon. Increasing urbanization, the dispersal of families, the organization of labour, different values, more individual than those that governed human relations even just a few decades ago — all these have weakened the role of elderly people in daily life.

Societies today, so-called modern or progressive societies, inspired by the international community and the will of nations, have decided to commemorate each year on the first of October an international day in their honour, doubtless because they have understood that it would be a real mistake to neglect the wealth of the accumulated and compounded lived experience of our elders and not to tap the availability and good will of thousands of people with many abilities.

Barely a year ago, on 1 October 1998, the International Year of Older Persons was launched successfully throughout the world and at United Nations Headquarters on the theme, "A society for all ages". The Principality of Monaco unreservedly endorsed the proclaimed goal of this theme. The involvement of my country in the commemoration of this Year was symbolized by the production of a postal stamp reproducing the logo chosen by the United Nations.

The Principality's Government, furthermore, upon the initiation of His Serene Highness, the Sovereign Prince, organized some special events to commemorate the Year. In particular, we developed and carried out a policy for ageing, striving to preserve and strengthen inter-generational solidarity and to promote the inspiring concept of a society for all ages. Since 1 October 1998 and until the end of this year, events have been organized and coordinated with a steering committee of public authorities, associations of retirees and young people, as well as social organizations. These various events have brought the generations closer. Young students have been invited to help in these cultural or educational or social events, among which I could refer to the organization of medical conferences, exhibiting works of art and the publication of a book of older persons' reminiscences related to Monaco's history.

A policy for older persons attests to the fundamental values that a country intends to promote. For many years now, we in Monaco have worked on actions to improve the living standards of older people, providing care facilities, financial assistance and specific measures to make their daily lives easier in an atmosphere of safety, with things such as meals on wheels, home help and medical alert systems.

Upon the initiative of His Serene Highness, and in accordance with the guidelines of the World Health Organization, we have established services to allow the elderly and the disabled to continue to live at home. Of course, these people can still chobse whether to remain at home or to be moved to a residence.

Turning to Government housing activities, a certain number of apartments will be specially designed for older and disabled persons and built in busy neighbourhoods, near shops and public transportation. For persons who need to placed in an institution, a long-term-stay establishment near the Princess Grace Hospital Centre will be built very soon.

Turning to financial matters, older Monagasques and older persons residing in Monaco receive, if necessary, a monthly allowance to subsidize their needs. The amount of this allowance, increased by 10 per cent this year on the occasion of the jubilee of His Serene Highness, the Sovereign Prince, is now close to the minimum wage.

These initiatives are particularly essential since the ageing of the population and the drop in the birth rate are particularly marked in our country. At the last population census, it was revealed that 22 per cent of our residents were over 65, and 11 per cent were over 75. According to some projections, in 2010 persons over 65 years old will account for 25 per cent of the population, whereas between the years 1990 and 2010, the percentage of persons over 85 is to increase by over 60 per cent.

Since the age pyramid is shrinking and could disappear, and since longevity is increasing, States both in the North and in the South need to adopt a new approach to ageing. It is now up to political and social leaders, in cooperation with the older people themselves, families and communities, to conceive of ageing in an active, dynamic way, not just as a matter of passive maintenance.

New demographic trends are forcing Governments to consider means to promote an old age which is more involved in society and community activities. This means that throughout a person's life span, physical and material capacities of individuals, particularly of women, whose average life expectancy is longer than that of men, must be maintained and even developed.

The policy adopted by the Government of the Principality seeks to ensure, in the context of increased longevity, living standards that meet the aspirations of our society and that are adapted to the context of the Principality of Monaco. It will achieve this by involving all of the community, including young people, in order to maintain this very valuable link between generations.

The report of the Secretary-General on the activities and the legacy of the Year attests to the interest shown by States, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations in establishing infrastructures and relations among various stakeholders to make it possible, as the programme of action on ageing advocates, that the preparation of the population as a whole for the last stages of life is an integral part of social policies and takes into account physical, psychological, cultural, religious, spiritual, economic, health and all other factors.

We are convinced that the special session the General Assembly will hold next year on the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development will make it possible to define specific strategies to establish "A society for all ages". Accordingly, the United Nations programme on ageing, which served as the secretariat for the International Year of Older Persons and which is the key element for the success of this commemoration, will have a decisive role to play in the follow-up to the Year. We would like to assure that secretariat of our full support.

The delegation of Monaco would also like to express its full support for the draft resolution resulting from our efforts.

Mrs. Eldermire-Shearer (Jamaica): Jamaica associates itself with the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We wish to thank the Secretary-General for the support and leadership he has provided on this issue. We also acknowledge the invaluable contribution of Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez of the Dominican Republic to the promotion of issues relating to the elderly.

It is no coincidence that the International Year of Older Persons is being observed at the end of this century, a century that has witnessed some of the most profound changes in human society. The rapid advances in science and technology, which have resulted in dramatic improvements in health, hygiene, nutrition and longevity, have also been attended by a swelling of the number of persons living to old age. Since 1950, global life expectancy has risen by 20 years to its present level of 60 years. The proportion of older persons has also increased significantly. Currently, 1 of every 10 persons is now 60 years or older, and by the year 2050, 1 in 5 will be 60 or older. The subject is of particular importance to the Caribbean, given that its ageing population is the oldest in the developing world.

Accordingly, we are grateful for the focus that has been placed on the challenges created by this demographic revolution, and for the report of the Secretary-General on the issue. The report demonstrates that the issue of population ageing is a complex interaction requiring collaboration between many agencies, governmental departments and non-governmental organizations. It is critical that ageing policies be integrated into the broader development framework.

Jamaica is also experiencing its own version of the demographic revolution, and the Government has established programmes to deal with the challenges that this phenomenon presents. Currently, senior citizens make up 10 per cent of the Jamaican population, and our life expectancy is in excess of 72 years. The elderly also make up the only segment of our population that increases in percentage terms from year to year. It is projected that by the year 2020 there will be approximately 400,000 senior citizens in Jamaica. In recognition of the additional needs of senior citizens — in particular, their additional health-care needs — the Jamaica Drugs for the Elderly Programme was instituted for all seniors, regardless of income levels. The Programme subsidizes the cost of prescription drugs for ailments that are particularly prevalent among the aged. There are now more than 100,000 persons age 60 and older registered in the Programme.

The Government of Jamaica, in recognizing the importance of senior citizens, in 1976 established a National Council on Ageing to advise on and develop programmes to improve the quality of life of seniors. The Council has both national and field operations, which are operated mainly by volunteers. The Council was the named focal point for the International Year of Older Persons and organized the Year's programmes. The Government provided the operational budget, and the private sector provided substantial additional assistance. The list of activities is being circulated in this Hall. I will, however, highlight a few.

The Government of Jamaica remains committed to the advancement of our senior citizens and has viewed

the observance of this year as an opportunity both to address deficiencies in the policies and programmes that relate to older persons and to build collaborative relationships. The activities for the year were organized around the general theme of "Towards a society for all ages", with particular emphasis being placed on two of the suggested sub-themes: the intergenerational approach and the developmental aspects of population ageing.

Education on ageing and associated issues was a major thrust of the Year. A major initiative, which will continue into the new millennium, is the education of young persons and their teachers about the life-course perspective of ageing. A second objective is to increase understanding and respect for older persons on the part of the other generations. Young persons need to understand that ageing is not a disease but a natural and inevitable process and that they should begin preparing for this stage of life while they are still young. A poster and essay competition was launched in support of this effort. The education component included a programme for other age groups, including the mid-life group, in support of the Active Ageing Global Embrace campaign.

For the future, strong collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Education — efforts supported personally by both Ministers — will continue. They will include curriculum development and education activities for students and teachers. The University of the West Indies, with funding from Help Age International, has developed a training programme for caregivers. This programme is simple enough to understand regardless of the trainee's level of literacy. The programme was developed in recognition of the importance of caregiving, which will be of increasing importance in the years to come. In recognition of the International Year, a manual for family caregiving is now being prepared.

We are grateful to the United Nations for the earlier initiatives that produced the global and national targets that are the foundations of Jamaica's National Policy on Ageing. The National Policy, which was submitted in Parliament in 1997 was widely publicized during the Year. It addresses eight main areas, including education, health, social security and income security. Advocacy was an essential tool in educating the population on the Government's National Policy. I wish to thank the local media in Jamaica for their collaboration, which included the weekly publication in the *Daily Gleaner* of a page dedicated to senior citizens' affairs.

The Government also sought to ensure that the subject of ageing remained at the forefront of the regional agenda. The Government moved resolutions at key meetings, such as at the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) Council on Human and Social Development in February 1999. CARICOM is also spearheading acceptance of a draft charter in support of healthy ageing, which charter was initiated in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization. The charter recognizes that patterns of living that enhance healthy and active ageing are formed early in life and continue throughout the lifespan. These patterns determine how well one is able to reduce and avoid diseases and disabilities and engage in social and productive activities.

Jamaica launched this charter at the national level during the walk in support of the Global Embrace on 2 October 1999. The charter was presented to leaders of Government, the private sector, trade unions, the churches and other non-governmental organizations that endorsed it at the launch.

In addition to economic concerns, research has identified loneliness and the lack of opportunities for social interaction as main concerns for Jamaica's senior citizens. There is now a programme, funded by a non-governmental organization but operated by the National Council, to support the income-generating activities of the seniors in Golden Age Clubs as a way of supporting productive ageing. More than 300 projects have been initiated, 30 of which were funded during the International Year.

As our hearts and eyes eagerly await the dawn of a new century and the promises which this exciting time will bring, let us not forget those who have accomplished much before us and upon whose shoulders we have built our present societies. It is our hope that future generations will be able to build a better, more compassionate world for our senior citizens in the years to come, so as to realize the aims of this year towards a society for all ages.

Ms. Corado-Cuevas (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Government of Guatemala welcomes all measures to promote the ongoing development and full participation of older persons, the guardians of the wisdom and values of our Guatemalan society, particularly within our indigenous population.

Our country is making a constant effort, within existing limitations, to translation the principles of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted in Vienna in 1982, into government policies and practical measures to meet the priority needs of older persons. Although a great deal remains to be done, the State and its institutions are responsible for providing older persons with the necessary conditions to ensure their quality of life by creating forward-looking mechanisms and strengthening national institutions that work on their behalf.

In this respect, Guatemala has adopted, *inter alia*, the following measures to protect older persons.

First, it enacted the Law on the Protection of Persons on the Third Age — Decree 80-96 of the Legislative Organ — whose purpose is to protect the interests of the elderly and to guarantee them living standards that are adequate for a useful and dignified existence. Its broad coverage includes, among other things, their right to participate in the national development process, their access without discrimination to sources of employment and their training for a second occupation. The Ministry of Public Health is responsible for health coverage. It is the responsibility of municipalities to eliminate architectural barriers to free movement, while public and private services are urged to provide exemptions and discounts in recognition of the social and economic situation of individuals. The foundations are also being laid to prevent and penalize mistreatment.

Secondly, we have created the post of Advocate for the Elderly within the National Attorney General's office. Its function is to support older persons in the case of verbal or physical abuse.

Thirdly, we have enacted the Law to Eradicate Family Violence — Decree 90-96 of the Legislative Organ — which protects the most vulnerable members of the family: children, women and the elderly.

I wish to make special reference to the Councils of Elders in our rural indigenous population, in which the elderly serve as guides to their people. These Councils are an example of power and authority established by the community; they provide guidance for the group and resolve conflicts. The members of the Councils orally transmit culture and knowledge, including traditional medicine. Women, unlike their counterparts elsewhere, play a role that is equally important as that of men. The Government of Guatemala is striving to help strengthen social indigenous institutions and, to that end, supports the Councils of Elders.

In addition, in commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons, a series of activities has been carried out in Guatemala to heighten the interest of the various sectors and to eliminate social and cultural barriers for older persons. We would cite, *inter alia*, the convening of congresses on gerontology, grandparents' fairs, health fairs, courses, sporting events, multigenerational parades, concerts, forums and so on, culminating last Saturday with a parade and a "Worldwide Embrace", with the participation of the President of the Republic.

In the future, we shall continue to strengthen all those activities in favour of older persons. That is why we support the convening of an international meeting in 2002 to review the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing. We also feel that the 1982 International Plan of Action on Ageing should be updated.

Lastly, I wish to express appreciation for the work carried out by the two Vice-Chairmen of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Older Persons: Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez of the Dominican Republic and Counsellor Aurelio Fernández of Spain. Since its establishment, the Consultative Group has been an important forum for exchanging information and experience among the various delegations, organs of the system and non-governmental organizations. It has enabled a continuous process of consultations to explore and analyze new individual and joint initiatives on issues concerning the third age.

Mr. Ribeiro Mendes (Portugal): Allow me to stress that Portugal fully subscribes to the statement made by the Finnish Presidency of the European Union.

Portugal, like most developed countries, is currently facing the enormous political, social and economic challenges associated with the accentuated ageing of its population. It is in this group of older persons that the risk of social exclusion is most prevalent. Also, several challenges arise from the ageing of the work force and the relative decrease in the economically active population. These challenges require the management of human resources to focus to a greater extent on age-related issues, a factor that has been neglected until now. They also call for the reformulation of policies that traditionally have provided incentives for early retirement from the labour market and for a new focus on lifelong

education and the provision of new opportunities for the elderly.

A second aspect of this challenge has to do with the pressures exerted on pension schemes and on public financial resources as a result of the growing number of retirees and the overall decrease in the population of working age. The growing need for health and social support services for the older person is a third aspect of these challenges. The dramatic increase in the number of older persons needing assistance will exert growing pressure on the existing long-term care system. Policies aimed at limiting an increase in dependency through the fostering of healthy ageing, the prevention of accidents and recovery following illness should be adopted.

To achieve these goals, the Portuguese Government has been developing innovative social policies for the active promotion of social rights. Thus, the following measures and social programmes have been developed.

In 1996 Portugal launched the guaranteed minimum income programme, which presently supports more than 130,000 families and nearly 400,000 persons, accounting for 4 per cent of the population of the country, of whom 90,000 are already covered by social insertion programmes. A significant portion of the beneficiaries are older persons aged 65 years or over.

Portugal has also adopted a new policy that differentiates the yearly increases of benefits to assist the more than 1 million individuals whose pensions are lower than the national minimum wage. At the same time, entitlement to old age pensions is now more flexible, so that the workers may adjust the timing of their retirement to professional, family or even labour market factors. When changes were made the preservation and financial sustainability of the social security system were kept in mind.

The measures I have mentioned do not pre-empt the need for the definition of a coherent strategy for the reform of Portugal's social security system, within the framework of our integration in the European Union.

As defined by the Portuguese Government, there are three major areas of universal social welfare which respond to new social risks, changes in the economy and the new ethics of the contractual partnership between the State and its citizens. These areas are, first, the protection of vulnerable groups and individuals, which is pursued through a system of entitlements based on citizenship and guaranteed through national solidarity; secondly, the protection of families, accomplished through the provision of cash benefits and services for the support of the older person facing dependency and other situations of great vulnerability; and, thirdly, income substitution schemes, which, through mandatory social security contributory regimes based on inter-professional and inter-generational solidarity, as well as voluntary private pension schemes, are to be fostered through adequate policies and incentives.

Portugal, as a member of the European Union, has placed social policies involving employment, job training, health, solidarity and social security at the very centre of its development model. These policies are in tune with the fundamental choices of the Union, with a view to a sustainable growth of the economy, with social justice, in a Europe for all ages.

The need to develop an active strategy for ageing has frequently been highlighted, both in the area of employment policies and in the areas of social action, health care and family policies.

Our policies of active ageing will continue to remove the constraints on lifelong flexibility for all citizens, so as to offer them a greater selection of options in areas such as education, job training, employment and health that can help them preserve their autonomy during old age. Thus, prolonged care should be regarded as a natural social risk to be jointly financed by the economically active population and the older person. Balanced access to home care and institutions should ensure an increasingly wider and financially sustainable coverage.

The reform of our public pensions system should also be considered in the light of this strategy of active ageing, taking into account the increase in longevity and the economic value of the older person as a human resource.

The need for new benefits geared specifically to the chronic dependency of the oldest citizens is also being addressed. In particular, as of July this year the social protection to be extended to old-age pensioners in a situation of dependency was defined and regulated. This resulted in the establishment of cash benefits whose amount varies according to the degree of dependency.

In conclusion, the autonomy of the older person and the enhancement of the abilities and skills of both

families and the community to deal with long-term dependency are now the main objectives of our social policies.

As stated by the presidency of the European Union yesterday, Portugal also regards the International Year of Older Persons as an important starting point and an opportunity to continue to build a world in which all generations may fully enjoy their rights of citizenship, fulfilling their personal goals in freedom and solidarity.

The actions taken within the United Nations system, which we praise, will yield their fruits if we can follow up on them. For our part, we will not relent in our efforts to develop active ageing strategies that allow older persons to live a longer life, with greater autonomy and fully integrated in the society to which they belong.

We will pursue these efforts in total solidarity with all the peoples of the world, continuing to contribute to this cause, which, from the old Europe to the emerging new countries, has often involved terrible social and human costs, particularly for the elderly and other vulnerable groups. The ongoing creation of the independent State of East Timor, which dramatically illustrates this, constitutes a responsibility for all mankind that will deserve our continued support.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): I wish to associate myself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Guyana, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

My delegation welcomes the report (A/54/268) of the Secretary-General and commends him for his efforts on this issue. As this year draws to a close, the world is reminded that all members of society should be given equal opportunities, irrespective of their age, as long as those citizens are able to participate in the activities of a society. We are also reminded of the new thinking that older persons must be viewed not as burdens on society, but rather, as useful citizens with equal obligations to shape our future.

Nambia's commitment to its older citizens is well known. Namibia is one of the very few countries in Africa which pay an old-age pension to its citizens who have reached the age of 60 years, until their departure from this world. Although this old-age pension is not sufficient to provide for all the needs of our elderly, especially for those who live in urban areas, it provides income and important sustenance to the majority of our elderly who live in rural areas. This old-age pension has also made it possible for the elderly in our society to care for their grandchildren, most of whom are left orphaned after their parents have died of the AIDS virus.

In addition to the old-age pension, the Government of Namibia also provides social welfare services to the elderly in the form of old-age homes. The elderly in these homes are provided with adequate care, including health care. They are also treated as State patients at no cost.

In order to supplement the insufficient old-age pension, the President of the Republic of Namibia will be launching a pension fund for the elderly at the end of this month. This launching is undertaken to coincide with the year-long activities of the International Year of Older Persons. The Government of Namibia is also currently advocating the possibility of formulating a national plan on the aged in our society.

It is estimated that by the year 2050, the elderly population of 60 years of age and older will be over 2 billion. This would be the first time in the history of humankind that the number of elderly would be greater than the number of children. It is also estimated that in the year 2050 the percentage of people of age 60 or older in Namibia will be more than three times what it is now.

It has been said that although we are living in the age of ageing, it is a territory of uncharted waters. It is a given fact that we are all talking about increased life expectancy in terms of expectations for quality of life and the type of services required to cope with future increasingly aged societies. Older men and women will require opportunities and support systems, including for income generation, social security and health care. We must thus plan in advance.

It is therefore fitting that the International Year's theme is "A society for all ages". The older people of today are in many ways the pioneers of yesterday and the foundation of tomorrow. Their tenacity and courage made our future so much easier, safer and healthier. It is thus incumbent upon all of us to make sure that we live in a society which will not discriminate against the aged. After all, we are all following the same path. It is only a matter of time before we ourselves will become the aged of tomorrow.

In this regard, we wish to express our appreciation for the preparatory work of the past two years to declare 1999 the International Year of Older Persons. This has

been a collaborative and cooperative effort by Governments, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. The adoption of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons in 1991 and the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing in 1992 provide us with a broad framework and guidance on what action to take on ageing.

I cannot conclude my remarks without referring to the negative impact the AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa has on our elderly population. In my country, Namibia, the elderly are left to care for the children who have become orphans after their parents have succumbed to the disease. Their role becomes that not only of grandparents but also of parents and caretakers. This has left the Government of Namibia with no other option but to redouble its efforts to ensure that this burden is mitigated by giving security to our elderly and supporting their needs in raising the children left behind.

However, in most traditional societies, such as that of Namibia, the elderly are also taken care of by the society and by their immediate families. Our customs require that the elderly be taken care of and provided for. For it is they who shaped our future.

This issue of the elderly is of particular importance to us, and therefore we hope that the draft resolution on this subject will be adopted without a vote.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): On 28 August 1948, the Argentine Government adopted the Declaration of Old Age Rights. This Declaration recognized that older persons enjoy specific rights: the rights to assistance, accommodation, food, physical and moral health care, recreation, work, stability and respect.

That initiative, supported by all political efforts and supplemented by adequate budgetary resources, was an important social step forward for Argentina, a country characterized by a multicultural population that was still assimilating the great influx of migration of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In 1948, the world had scarcely begun to recover from the Second World War. In its tragic aftermath, great instruments were being created, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted at the end of that same year, and the Geneva Conventions, adopted the following year.

But longevity was not such an urgent question at that time; a developing country's stipulations that older persons enjoyed rights inherent to their age was in the vanguard. That initiative went beyond Argentina's domestic sphere.

It is interesting to reread United Nations documents from that time. On page 618 of the *Yearbook of the United Nations* for 1948-1949, it says that on 23 September 1948 Argentina raised this issue in document A/621 at the third session of the General Assembly, held that year at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, requesting its inclusion in the agenda and submitting the Draft Declaration of Old Age Rights in document A/C.3/213.

During the night meeting of the Third Committee on 22 November 1948, Ambassador Enrique Corominas introduced the item on behalf of Argentina. On 30 November, the Committee adopted it by 28 votes in favour, with 10 abstentions. That night, following the vote, the Argentine representative thanked representatives who had voted in favour of the Argentine proposal. He also thanked the representatives who had abstained, because the assistance of both had made it possible to consecrate a legitimate right that someday would be incorporated into the legislation of all countries.

Finally, on 4 December 1948, the General Assembly adopted resolution 213 (III) by 48 votes in favour, none against and 1 abstention. Thus, the question of older persons was introduced for the first time in the United Nations. The rights envisaged in that 1948 ideal today are found in the 62 recommendations of the International Plan of Action on Ageing of 1982 and in other subsequent instruments.

Fifty-one years have passed since 1948. That is not so long, for it is the same number of years remaining until 2050, when the number of people over 60 will exceed the number of those under 15. In some places this will even occur some decades earlier. The extension of average lifespan, particularly in the societies that create most wealth, and the decline in the birth rate, are producing an unprecedented demographic shift in which the population pyramid looks like the one of 50 years ago, turned upside down. These statistics show that in a few more years the international community will need to have resolved all the obstacles to achieving a multigenerational society which guarantees dignity and usefulness for older persons, integrating them into the fabric of society.

The task ahead will be a very difficult one: in a few more years, the United Nations programme on ageing will probably need to take on the scale and visibility enjoyed by other agencies in the system today if there is to be an effective response to this challenge. At the global, national and local levels, education, the market, health and all social actors must have accepted older persons as useful agents for development.

Today the question of older persons which was brought to the United Nations 51 years ago has become a much larger issue: the International Year is proof. Argentina is involved in the Year through a number of initiatives, some of which were mentioned in paragraph 10 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268). Argentina is particularly concerned about the effects of poverty on older persons. Among other activities, the national plan for older persons is assisting almost half a million poor older persons by providing food supplements, group outings, subsidies and medicines. The *Probienestar* wellness programme, geriatric programmes and economic subsidies of the National Institute for Social Security for Retirees and Pensioners and the Programme for Solidarity Assistance for Older Persons run by the Department of Social Development are other current initiatives.

Today, this challenge concerns all countries. Argentina supports the proposal to hold a Second World Assembly on Ageing 20 years after the first great world summit on ageing, in 1982. We are happy to support Spain's effort — a country which we wish to thank for the cooperation it has provided for Argentina in this field — to have the Second World Assembly on Ageing in that country.

When the International Year is over, the work must still go on. As Ambassador Julia Alvarez of the Dominican Republic has so rightly said — and we do wish to recognize her clear-sightedness, dedication and efforts — it is to be hoped that we will have the determination and vision to ensure that on 31 December, the older persons will at last occupy their proper place on the world map.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am honoured to address the General Assembly on this item. I should like to associate my delegation with the statement by the Permanent Representative of Guyana speaking on behalf of the Group of 77.

I commend the Secretary-General for his report (A/54/268) on this agenda item, and the Secretariat for the considerable efforts it has made for the observance of the International Year of Older Persons.

The ageing of populations and the increase in the number of elderly throughout the world which are the results of medical, hygienic, scientific and educational achievements are phenomena of the late twentieth century. This new development is producing changes in all aspects of community life, aspects such as the age structure, values, norms and institutions of societies at the global level.

The number of people aged 65 or over in 2025 is projected to be 828 million, which is more than two and a half times the 328 million figure for 1990. Although at present the greying of the population is more an issue in industrial countries, Asia too will be faced with a major ageing population group in the near future, so that by 2025 nearly 56 per cent of the world's over-60 population of 1,181 million will live in Asia.

Since there is a difference in longevity between the sexes — women generally live longer than men in nearly every part of the world, as the Secretary-General refers notes in his recent report to the General Assembly — women constitute a majority of the elderly population.

Despite the vast opportunities created by advances in technology, which have improved the quality of life of people at the global level, economic inequality has, unfortunately, been magnified and the number of people living in poverty — especially in developing countries — has dramatically increased. In this regard, elderly poor women are especially vulnerable, and therefore particular attention has to be paid to their needs in any welfare programme schemed for the elderly population.

This year, the core theme of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, held in Geneva in July, was devoted to poverty eradication and the empowerment and advancement of women. In the ministerial communiqué adopted at that session it was emphasized that in any strategies to eradicate poverty, the empowerment of women in particular was a prerequisite for effective poverty eradication and that the international community had a key role to play in supporting efforts to eradicate poverty.

In many developing countries, particularly in the Asian region, family support is considered the norm and people traditionally believe that family can provide the best emotional and economic support for older persons.

However, this practice is gradually weakening as a consequence of individualization, urbanization and the prevalence of a more nuclear family system. Therefore, in addition to family support, other sources of active involvement by Governments and various institutions of civil society — including the private sector and non-governmental organizations — should be invited to contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes for older people.

Although the Islamic Republic of Iran has a young population and the percentage of older persons above 60 years of age is not more than 6 per cent of the total population, my country nevertheless supports the common international framework established by the United Nations to promote the status of the elderly and is committed to supporting their rights, to utilizing their experiences and to providing them with adequate social security, including pension and health-care services. This conviction of ours stems from numerous recommendations of the Holy Koran for the respect, care and protection of parents and older persons. Also on the basis of our cultural and religious values, older persons, while protected by the family, are constantly being consulted on important family issues, which ensures their dignity.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the national welfare organization supports the elderly at the country level and provides them with welfare services. That organization, with its 63 centres, provides hospitalization and other accommodation to guardianless elderly people throughout the country. Also, the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee has a special responsibility to provide basic needs and services to elderly persons who do not have any family.

With regard to our national commitments to support the United Nations common framework for the promotion of the status of the elderly, several measures have been taken in my country for the betterment of the quality of life of older persons, *inter alia*, the raising of community awareness in this regard. Some of the measures taken are as follows.

Information and education campaigns on ageing to promote positive images of ageing are launched every year with the close collaboration of associations of retired persons on the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons, on 1 October.

In line with the commemoration of the United Nations International Year of Older Persons, a number of seminars on the problems of the elderly have been organized, books and articles have been published and movies, films and radio and television programmes have been produced.

Our first international conference on ageing is going to be held this month. That conference is sponsored by the Ladies' Charitable Society, an active Iranian non-governmental organization affiliated with the Kahrizak Home for the Disabled and the Elderly, which has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. The objective of the conference is to bring experts together from all over the world to exchange ideas, expertise and experience on issues related to the elderly.

Since ageing will be one of the major demographic, social, health and economic issues of the next millennium and needs to be confronted with great efficacy and timely planning, the gathering and exchange of information and knowledge between the Member States and international organizations, as was recommended in the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, while ensuring the ongoing process of paying special attention to the situation of the older persons at the global level, would also help strengthen the bonds between the older and younger generations with a view to deriving benefit from the experience and cultural heritage of older persons. In this regard, the Islamic Republic of Iran fully supports the suggestions for the development of a long-term perspective strategy on ageing for the twenty-first century.

Announcement

The President: I draw the attention of the Assembly to a matter concerning the maintenance of order in the Assembly Hall. Despite previous letters and appeals by my predecessors, numerous delegations are still letting cellular phones ring in the General Assembly Hall and in conference rooms while meetings are in progress. It is obvious that the ringing of telephones while debates or discussions are ongoing is disruptive of the orderly proceedings of the meetings. I urge representatives and other members of delegations to turn cellular telephones off or keep them in silent mode while in the General Assembly Hall or in a conference room and a meeting is in progress.

I am very serious about this matter and I may be forced to name non-compliant delegations should this renewed appeal be ignored.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.